

HIGHER EDUCATION UPDATE

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News from the

CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION

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Toward a Greater Understanding of the State's Educational Equity Policies, Programs, and Practices: A Vision of the California of Tomorrow

THIS series of six Higher Education Updates (with accompanying Fact Sheets) explores California's policies, programs, and practices designed to provide all our students with an equal opportunity to pursue their educational goals -- goals that benefit both individuals and our state. The Commission's intention in publishing this series is to enhance understanding among all Californians and our policy-makers about the importance of educational equality to our State's future. Beginning in April, 1997, the Commission will be publishing a Higher Education Update approximately every two months through February, 1998. At that time, the series will conclude with the publication of an Update that presents a set of options for the State to consider for furthering our goal of educational opportunity for all Californians.

This second Higher Education Update transitions from a discussion of our state's past and present to the future. Charles Franklin Kettering, an electrical engineer whose name is most associated with the Sloan-Kettering Institute for Cancer Research, spoke to the most practical reason to focus on the future:

We should all be concerned about the future because
we will have to spend the rest of our lives there.
(Seed for Thought, 1949)

The Commission offers a vision of a California of tomorrow that capitalizes on our many strengths and seeks to minimize our real and potential liabilities, as described in the previous installment in this series. Our vision is predicated on projections about California's population -- our strongest asset -- and the economic and cultural environments in which Californians will live and work.

What will California look like tomorrow?

The most striking characteristic of our state in the future will be the diversity -- in myriad ways -- of our population. Our diversity is illustrated by several facts:

- ♦ The two fastest growing age groups in our population will be the young and the elderly;
- ♦ By the year 2000, no single racial-ethnic group will constitute a majority of our state's population; moreover, our Asian and Latino populations will continue to grow at a faster rate than other racial-ethnic groups in our state (Display 1 on the accompanying Fact Sheet); and,
- ♦ Economic disparities between our wealthiest and poorest residents are likely to increase in ways that have real consequences in terms of differences in opportunities and life experiences (Display 3).

In addition to our population heterogeneity, our economy and workplaces will be far more diverse than in the past. All occupational categories will experience growth simply as a function of population increases. However, the two categories that are expected to blossom are the "Professional-Technical" fields because of our state's reliance on our "high tech" industries to sustain our future economy and the "Service" fields (Display 4). Not surprisingly, a strong relationship exists between income levels and occupations, with higher incomes associated with the professional and managerial occupations and lower incomes occurring among the service and sales fields.

This picture of our state in the future presents a clear view of both the opportunities and challenges from which the Commission has built its vision of the California of tomorrow.

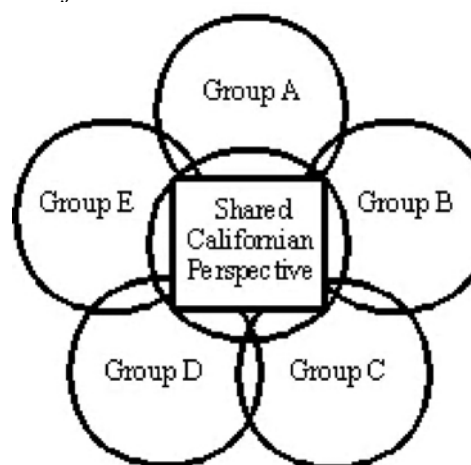
What is the Commission's vision of the California of tomorrow?

The Commission's vision assumes that the diversity of our population is both a fact and a potential upon which to create a future California that is characterized by inclusiveness, personal and social responsibility, independence, and equality. In that regard, the Commission views a California of tomorrow as:

...one in which all Californians have an expanded opportunity to develop their talents and skills to the fullest, for both individual and collective benefit. This vision is one in which the characteristics of Californians -- ethnicity, race, language, socioeconomic status, gender, home community, and disability -- do not determine . . . accomplishments and achievements" (*The Role of the Commission in Achieving Educational Equity*, p. 1).

Display A presents a visual representation of the Commission's vision of the California of tomorrow. The outer five circles -- to which many others could be added -- represent groups of individuals within our state who are distinguished by similarity in terms of socio-economic, racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, or other characteristics. Each of these groups of individuals is unique in some sense and each has a culture that is group-specific. In this figure, these circles -- and by implication the cultures -- remain whole, but aspects of each group's culture also contribute to the creation of a shared Californian perspective -- the central circle in this diagram.

Display A The Commission's Vision of the California of Tomorrow



Display A: The Commission's Vision of the California of Tomorrow

What is this shared Californian perspective?

All Californians participate in creating this shared perspective which is a composite of our various individual identities and the group cultures in our state. However, the shared Californian perspective is more than simply the sum of all our parts; rather, it is a unique perspective arising from the interaction among and between the cultures that comprise our state.

The overarching principle in this shared Californian perspective is the full inclusion of all our residents into the society -- an inclusion in which all Californians reap personal rewards and our state reaps collective benefits from all our participants. Moreover, this perspective incorporates the fundamental nature of American society. Our country's motto "*E Pluribus Unum*" calls upon Americans to recognize and appreciate our differences, but to focus on the development of a general viewpoint that benefits the whole.

The specific principles of our shared perspective are:

- ♦ An awareness of, and appreciation and respect for, the values and strengths that all our individuals, groups, cultures, and viewpoints contribute to California;
- ♦ A recognition of the need to learn about all our cultures in order that Californians can work, live, and participate together in developing a functional and productive society; and,
- ♦ A responsibility to identify similarities among our individuals and groups in order that California can make progress in implementing an agreed upon common plan for the future.

How can this vision be realized?

Attempting to realize this vision commits Californians to travel on a journey whose destination has yet to be reached by any previous state or country -- a society that is truly inclusive, pluralistic, and celebratory of our differences and diversity. Moreover, this vision requires that all Californians engage in a process of introspection and reexamination of our traditional views of others, our

modes of interaction, and our fundamental values -- a potentially frightening but exciting prospect that will challenge all of our individual and collective intellects and character.

The role of education in meeting this challenge is crucial. As a visiting team of educators from other countries noted nearly a decade ago:

The burden of incorporation into a pluralistic society has to rest centrally on the integrative capacity of the educational system . . . to unite a prosperous State” (*Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development*, p. 89).

Simply put, Californians must depend upon our educational system at all levels to ensure that the shared Californian perspective depicted in Display A is taught and is learned. Only in this way can our diversity be transformed from a mere fact into a viable strength of our state. Our educational system’s responsibility in creating this shared perspective -- integral to the Commission’s vision of the California of tomorrow -- is the topic of the next installment in this series.

The Commission offers a vision of a California of tomorrow . . . that is characterized by inclusiveness, personal and social responsibility, independence, equality and . . . a shared Californian perspective that . . . recognizes and appreciates our differences but focuses on the development of a general viewpoint that benefits the whole . . .

Californians must depend upon our educational system at all levels to ensure that the shared Californian perspective is taught and is learned.
